With Compliments of
Robert H. Sayre

The Threshold

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THE THRESHOLD.

"Limen Superum Inferumque, Salve."

PLAUTUS.

EDWARD H. WILLIAMS, JR.

EX LIBRIS
ROBERT HEYSHAM SAYRE
SOUTH BETHLEHEM, PA.
PACKARD, DEL.
"WHO MAINTAINS OBTAINS"
—1900—

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A MAN'S THRESHOLD is the central point of his life. Here he welcomes the coming and speeds the parting guest. It marks his "home"; the starting point and the end of all his journeys; his "golden mile" from which all distances are measured. In old world times he sat before it to greet the passing traveler and welcome him to his hospitality; while all who crossed it unbidden and by force became enemies. It was a spot consecrated by many rites, and hallowed by many memories. Here were twined the garlands appropriate to the family festivities. Here were first propitiated the Lares and Penates—those family divinities presiding over the house and all its transactions, however trivial. To stumble on the threshold was unfortunate; to strike it when first entering the family was calamitous. At

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appropriate times the head of the household renewed the threshold covenant that to him and his might come only good fortune. Here the trembling bride paused ere she entered the house, and having twined about the posts strands of wool from her distaff and solemnly anointed them, that to her and hers might come the favor of her husband's gods, was carefully lifted over the sacred spot lest her foot should strike it, and met the awaiting bridegroom offering fire and water which, once touched, admitted her to the protection of the house.

This threshold covenant is found running back beyond those dim ages when history began to be written. We all readily recall one noted instance of world wide import, on that night fraught with woe to Egypt, when Jehovah held back his destroying angel from the blood-stained doors of the Israelites, who by this covenant had become his peculiar people.

It is the fashion with some to decry sentiment, and to look upon life as a mere series of business transactions. There are few, however, whose thoughts do not recur with pleasure to their childhood's home and its

well worn threshold, over which they passed to the welcome always awaiting them and always sincere. It has fallen to the fortune of some to know historic thresholds, brought from noted spots, or sacred from family tradition. Our American life, though brief, has given us a past peopled with heroes and a present rich in family shrines where we preserve the relics of revolutionary or colonial days. It is the fortune of the writer to tell of a threshold; a relic of the remote past; a traveled threshold; an historic threshold; connected, perhaps, with the origin of our race, which has found an honored resting place at the door of the library wing lately added to the residence of Robert H. Sayre, Esq., of South Bethlehem, Pa.

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This thriving town, on the flanks of the mountains bordering the southern side of the great valley of Eastern Pennsylvania, has grown about the residence of Mr. Sayre who, as the right hand of the late Judge Packer, built the Lehigh Valley Railroad, and thus was a prime mover in converting a quiet farming district into a congeries of busy cities. Twenty miles to the north the Blue Ridge

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stretches its level crest as the northern border of the same valley. A geologist might pass over the beauty of the scene with its alternations of rolling upland and narrow flats bordering the water courses; its well-tilled farms; its smoky furnaces and forges; its mines and quarries—all speaking of thrift—and merely note it in his record as a Cambro-Silurian valley with bordering uplifts—to the north of Oneida, Medina and Clinton; to the south, of Archæan. He might further jot down that the valley had been glaciated throughout at this point, and afterward submerged to the 500 ft. (A. T.) contour line; below which level the surface universally exhibited iceberg clay with a burden varying from gravel to huge bowlders. He might conclude with the statement that this ephemeral body of water had been named Lake Packer in honor of the gentleman who had done so much to develop the region.

Coming now to the history of the subject of this sketch, it will be necessary to leave the misty and debatable region of tradition and speculation for the surer ground of geology, and to briefly review the remote past. The

region just noticed was, at the beginning of the Cambrian and till the end of the Lower Silurian the off-shore border of a now forgotten continent which furnished sediments for distribution in its bordering ocean. We find these sediments varying from sands to calcareous mud, and thence to fine clays with intermittent bands of sand, which were distributed in deep or waveless water. At the beginning of the Upper Silurian we find a change in the physical geography, as the waters were both shallow and moved by strong waves and currents. In these was distributed over a large area a deposit of sand and quartz gravel which became itself covered by varying sediments to such a depth that, a few miles to the northwest it was buried beneath six miles of later accumulations. A permanent and secure burial one would think, and beyond the chance of resurrection; but such was not to be the case. The weighted sea bottom could not resist the contraction of the cooling globe and, at the end of the Carbonic Era, became so crumpled and compressed over the width of the State of Pennsylvania that it became a series of folds

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miles in width and depth. Atmospheric agencies began at once to cut down the elevations and the Cretaceous sea encroached upon the newly made continent till it reached the center of the State and its waves flowed over the region now traversed by the summits of the Alleghenies. Then began a gradual arising from the water till the continental border resembled a plane surface inclined from the Alleghenies to the ocean—the Cretaceous peneplain. Since that period frost and rain and changing seasons have excavated the valleys of this State from the softer beds which were brought to the surface by the catastrophe which ended the Carbonic Era; while the more resisting beds remain to form the ridges whose level crests mark the relics of a vast peneplain. At the close of the Tertiary Era ridge and valley stood nearly as at present, when ice began to accumulate to the northward, and as a huge glacier pressed to the southwest over the Blue Ridge into the great valley of Pennsylvania. At Easton it crossed the Lehigh as a huge dam which backed the water as far as Mauch Chunk, and formed a lake extending westward from Easton for

twenty-six miles, with a depth of water at South Bethlehem of two hundred and eighty feet. The torrential current through this lake was toward the east, and as it swept past the elevation on which the South Bethlehem reservoir is located, it was deflected into eddies in the quiet bay which covered the small valley running up to Salisbury. The glacial ice crushed the projecting crests of whatever it had surmounted, and carried off the masses to smooth and polish them by abrasion or water action, as they were frozen in the moving mass. When the glacier reached the lower levels of the valley and plunged into the lake, its buoyancy broke off the fore-front into bergs which floated with the current, grounding on the shallows and circling in the eddies, where they dropped their burden of clay, sand, gravel and bowlders. These were most liberally dropped behind the shoulders of hills, in quieter waters, and where eddies detained the floating masses. It is possible that mankind, skin-clad, was hunting the mammoth and its congeners while this was transpiring, and his frail craft may have navigated this ephemeral lake. When

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the retreating ice released the impounded waters, the surface of the region which they covered was left with a clay cap varying in thickness from a few inches to more than thirty feet, which held the burden of the icebergs.

The excavation for the library wing of Mr. Sayre's residence disclosed an accumulation of cobbles and bowlders of varying dimensions heaped together as if by design; but their glaciated surfaces and variety of composition marked the spot as beneath an eddy in Lake Packer where bergs dropped the masses torn from all the geological outcrops to the north, even from Archæan granulite to Carbonic sandstone. Among them was a mass of Oneida-Medina sandstone, fresh and sound, measuring fourteen feet in length by three and one-half feet in breadth and three in thickness. This pilgrim from the distant Blue Ridge was raised from its ancient bed and a portion of it was split and dressed to form a threshold for the future library within less than twenty feet of the spot where it had been lying. It is a characteristic piece of stone, and shows the result of the forces

which produced the catastrophe at the close of the Palæozoic, in a series of "gash veins" where nature had patched the rents with quartz vein stuff.

Here is a relic, a silent time-keeper, which may well cause the visitor to stop and ponder over the ages it commemorates. When it was forming on the shallow sea bottom the highest type of life was exhibited in the armor-clads who ruled those early seas as types of future armor-clads which, secure in a defensive coat forged in this region under the general management of Mr. Sayre, should carry our country's flag in the forefront of the battle and win victory under the mighty blows of Lehigh Valley ordnance.

Slowly the sediments heaped over the region, while emerging shores gradually formed a continent, beautiful with the verdure of the coal forests. The gash veins, however, mark their end and introduce the Mesozoic world teeming with reptilian life, whose monsters could squat upon their haunches and crop the foliage fifty feet above the soil, while birds with teeth, and forepaws like lizards, flew heavily through the air. Amid the

changes which introduced the first of the present families of forest trees, the encroaching ocean swept away the cover to the mass we are describing, and when the age vanished and the Tertiary with its modern animals came on the scene, it was the crest of a slight ridge gradually becoming more pronounced as the valleys on either side were sculptured by frost and storm. These forces also worked upon that crest and fitted it to yield to the towering wall of ice soon to submerge and crush it ere it bore it on its last journey southward towards its ancient origin in the long lost and forgotten continent. We can estimate how vast an ice mass was required to float it to its resting place while, perchance, pre-historic man viewed with wonder the towering ice field to the north and heard the thunder of the rupturing masses ere they sailed away on their last voyage.

What are the ruins of Assyria or Egypt in the presence of this hoary wanderer? While they mark the passage of a few centuries, it points beyond the coming of our first ancestors to those early years of the earth when the

Creator, having separated light from darkness, was fashioning the outlines of the continents and foreseeing all of its wonder and grandeur, even to our times when America, girded with weapons forged in this Lehigh Valley, should suddenly take its place as a world power, for freedom, for honor, for justice, and for right. The ordinary man might have been pleased to find so nice an assortment of stones collected for building his cellar wall. It remained for Mr. Sayre to study the origin of the collection, to perceive the element of romance connected therewith, and to wish to have it preserved in this memorial of one of the oldest and largest of travelers in the Lehigh Valley, lying 301.35 feet above mean tide.

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